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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 4 December 2013 to 10 March 2014

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past three months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended by subsequent resolutions, most recently through resolution 2131 (2013).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was generally maintained, albeit in a continuously volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Violations of the ceasefire are set out below. The Syrian armed forces continued to deploy personnel and equipment inside the area of separation and carried out military activities and security operations against armed members of the opposition in the UNDOF area of operation, at times in response to offensives carried out by the armed members of the opposition. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and military equipment is in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israeli and Syrian forces.

3. Military activities conducted by the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in the area of separation have the potential to increase tensions between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries and pose a risk to the local civilian population and United Nations personnel. As underscored by the Security Council in its resolution 2131 (2013), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

4. In the context of the clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, there were seven incidents of firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line during the reporting period. On 23 December, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that an artillery round had landed in an orchard in the vicinity of Mount Al Farras. An UNDOF investigation confirmed that an artillery round had been fired from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line. No injuries to persons or damage to property had occurred. UNDOF had immediately informed the Syrian authorities of the incident and had urged them to ask the Syrian

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armed forces to stop their firing. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF on 17 February that one mortar round had been fired from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line. UNDOF investigated the incident, but, because of the prevailing security situation in the area, it was not able to reach the indicated location to verify an impact. From 18 to 20 February, United Nations personnel observed a total of seven mortar and artillery rounds landing on the Alpha side. The Israel Defense Forces did not respond to these incidents. On 1 March, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that three explosions had occurred close to one of its positions in the Mount Hermon area, 3 kilometres north of Majdal Shams. UNDOF investigated the incident, but only one location was identified. The impact site indicated that the round had been fired from a north-eastern direction. On 11 February, UNDOF observed 10 Israel Defense Forces soldiers briefly crossing the Alpha line north of United Nations observation post 53. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing of the ceasefire line, are violations of the Disengagement Agreement.

5. Firing from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line took place on 5 March, when the Israel Defense Forces fired 17 tank rounds towards the village of New Hamadiyah in the area of separation. Immediately after the firing, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that Israel Defense Forces soldiers had observed three persons placing an unknown "object" at the technical fence, west of the ceasefire line, after which the Israel Defense Forces had fired at the persons and at a Syrian armed forces position from which the Israel Defense Forces said the persons had come. The Israel Defense Forces also informed UNDOF that they had observed activity by the three persons in that area for three days. UNDOF had not seen the individuals, but had observed the Israel Defense Forces preparing firing positions with four tanks and two armoured personnel carriers and subsequently firing the tank rounds. UNDOF immediately protested the Israel Defense Forces firing across the ceasefire line and reminded the Israel Defense Forces of the importance of liaison with UNDOF to prevent escalation of the situation. UNDOF also contacted the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, who protested the Israel Defense Forces firing and informed UNDOF that 14 Syrians, including members of the security forces, had been injured by the Israel Defense Forces tank fire. Initial findings of the UNDOF investigation showed that the "object" was an improvised explosive device camouflaged as a rock that had been placed approximately 20 metres west of the ceasefire line and five metres east of the technical fence. The preliminary investigation found that the device had a trigger wire connected to the technical fence with two ignition charges connected to wires placed on the back of it as a second trigger mechanism. The UNDOF investigation could not determine who had placed the device. The investigation confirmed that the Israel Defense Forces tank rounds had hit a mosque and a school in New Hamadiyah, and had impacted the surrounding area. The UNDOF Force Commander was in contact with both sides, who assured him of their continued commitment to the Disengagement Agreement and their efforts to prevent an escalation of the situation.

6. Inadvertent crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, was observed on an almost daily basis by United Nations personnel on the ground. This also included persons digging out and removing landmines, as further described in paragraph 22. Throughout the reporting period, UNDOF observed incidents when armed members of the opposition interacted with the Israel Defense Forces across the ceasefire line in the vicinity of United Nations position 85. On

many of these occasions, particularly during periods of heavy engagement between the Syrian armed forces and members of the armed opposition, UNDOF observed armed members of the opposition transferring wounded persons from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line to the Israel Defense Forces. On 17 January, UNDOF observed the Israel Defense Forces on the Alpha side handing over three persons to the armed members of the opposition from the Bravo side. Following information from the Israel Defense Forces that an explosion had occurred along the technical fence and that the explosion had been caused by the Bravo side to target Israel Defense Forces soldiers, UNDOF confirmed that an explosion had occurred close to the technical fence, but did not find evidence that a deliberate attack had been carried out.

7. Overall, in the course of the reporting period in the UNDOF area of operation, heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition continued, focusing on certain locations. Fighting was most intense in the central and south-central parts of the area of separation, including along the main UNDOF supply road, and in the area of limitation just east of it. The presence and use of heavy weapons and equipment by the Syrian armed forces continued. The use of anti-tank missiles by armed members of the opposition also continued. Beginning in early February, clashes diminished in the towns of Jabbata, Ufaniyah and Khan Aranbeh. In the southern parts of the area of separation, armed members of the opposition further expanded and consolidated areas under their influence.

8. Specifically, in the area of separation heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition continued in Bir Ajam, Braika and Al Rafid, and Syrian armed forces continued to fire onto the areas of Jabbata, Trunje, Ufaniyah, Al Horaye, Al Samdaniyah and Al Qahtaniyah. Heavy fighting also occurred in the areas of Khan Arnabeh, Al Baath and Al Hamidiyah, principally along the main UNDOF supply road. Intense clashes also took place in the villages immediately to the east of the area of separation, including Jaba, Um Batinah, Mamtanah, Kudnaa, Ein al Tina, Ain Zeiwan, Suwaysah and Abo Garah. Small arms fire from inside the area of separation and heavy artillery, mortar, main battle tank, machine gun and anti-aircraft fire from the area of limitation in close vicinity to the Bravo line occurred on a daily basis. The calming of the situation in Jabbata, Ufaniyah and Khan Arnabeh in February reportedly resulted from local truce arrangements. UNDOF observed a number of civilians, apparently moving back to their homes. The humanitarian situation in the Jabbata area, which had become particularly grave, has been alleviated somewhat with the civilians having access to some food supplies.

9. Incidents of particular note were as follows. On 13 January, Syrian armed forces launched an attack on armed members of the opposition in areas south of Khan Arnabeh and Al Baath in the central part of the area of separation. The Syrian armed forces employed two tanks, which had been prepositioned in the area of limitation, one of which was moved later into the area of separation and burnt by armed members of the opposition. The second tank was seen moving east of the area of separation. The clashes and exchange of gunfire lasted throughout the day, and the main road between Camp Faouar on the Bravo side and Camp Ziouani on the Alpha side remained closed for two days. During these incidents, one round of small arms fire hit a door at United Nations position 62, causing minor damage. In the days following the fighting in that area, Syrian armed forces reconstructed and refurbished a previously abandoned Syrian armed forces position south of Khan

Arnabeh, inside the area of separation. On several occasions since then, UNDOF has observed the presence of one tank, one anti-aircraft gun and several Syrian armed forces soldiers at the position. The Force Commander protested this violation of the Disengagement Agreement to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate.

10. The heaviest fighting in the UNDOF area of operation during the reporting period started on 29 January, with several coordinated attacks by members of the armed opposition on Syrian armed forces positions and checkpoints in the vicinity of Tal al-Garbi and Tal al-Sharqi and the surrounding villages in the area of limitation, immediately adjacent to the area of separation. These confrontations saw the use of heavy weapons, including one tank previously captured from the Syrian armed forces, by armed members of the opposition, and almost daily use of airstrikes by the Syrian armed forces. On 6 and 9 February, during flights of Syrian armed forces aircraft and helicopters over the area, UNDOF personnel observed explosions in the area of limitation, which would be consistent with "barrel bombs" having been used. The fighting engulfed a wide area of the area of limitation on the Bravo side, thereby significantly restricting the UNDOF supply routes to United Nations positions in the southern part of the area of operations. On several occasions since these heavy clashes started, the Syrian armed forces conducted resupply missions by helicopter to their positions at Tal al-Garbi and Tal al-Sharqi. On each occasion, UNDOF informed the Israel Defense Forces of the activity. Starting on 16 February, UNDOF observed a Syrian armed forces counter-offensive being conducted in the same area, involving a significant number of troops, again including the use of airstrikes. On 16, 17, 18 and 20 February, personnel at United Nations position 69 and on 19 February personnel at United Nations position 68 went into the shelter, following impacts of gunfire close to their positions. In the course of the fighting, which continues at the time of writing this report, though at reduced intensity since 24 February, UNDOF observed the use of one tank by armed members of the opposition in the vicinity of United Nations observation post 52 in the area of separation.

11. In a disturbing development, I am obliged to report that on 18 February, United Nations personnel saw, from a distance, the bodies of five individuals who had been beheaded, all reportedly Syrian armed forces personnel. That was in the vicinity of Qahtaniyah, in a location used by armed members of the opposition and where some armed members of the opposition were present. In a similar atrocity on 19 February, armed members of the opposition left a human head on the ground for about two hours in proximity to United Nations position 69. On the same day, the armed members of the opposition informed the peacekeepers that they had 10 Syrian armed forces soldiers in captivity whom they had captured during fighting the previous day in the area of Zbedah al-Gharbia in the area of limitation.

12. On 27 December, during intensive fighting between the Syrian armed forces and members of the opposition in the vicinity of Al Qahtaniya, United Nations peacekeepers observed five armed members of the opposition firing from around unmanned United Nations outpost 60A. On 6 January, the peacekeepers observed three persons leaving the unmanned United Nations outpost 80A. On 24 January, seven single shots of small arms were fired towards the platform of United Nations observation post 52 by five persons near the observation post. In addition, UNDOF has received reports that indicate that the positions vacated temporarily by UNDOF and the Observer Group Golan in the southern part of the area of operation were

being used by armed members of the opposition. Owing to the security situation in the area, UNDOF was not in a position to confirm those reports.

13. On numerous occasions during periods of fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, United Nations personnel were forced to take shelter in their positions. On 3 December, a mortar landed at United Nations position 68, causing damage to the position, and shrapnel hit the flak jacket of a United Nations peacekeeper. The soldier was unharmed. On 21 December, the platform of United Nations observation post 56 was hit by a stray round of anti-aircraft gunfire. On 3 January and 4 February, Syrian armed forces troops fired close to United Nations position 69. On 7 January there was firing close to United Nations observation post 56. On 13 January, United Nations position 62 sustained one impact from small arms fire. On the same day, UNDOF personnel observed four Syrian armed forces soldiers using the position as cover from firing for some time during the day. On 29 January, one mortar round landed in close proximity to United Nations position 68. On 4 February, three artillery rounds fired from the area of limitation landed close to United Nations position 69. On 16 and 22 February, two artillery rounds and one tank shell, respectively, landed in close proximity to United Nations position 69, and on 18 February three rounds impacted in the vicinity of United Nations position 68. On 25 February, one stray bullet hit the vehicle of a private contractor at United Nations observation post 52. UNDOF protested all incidents to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and urged him to ensure that the Syrian troops were informed of and understood the need to respect the safety of United Nations personnel and positions. Following UNDOF interventions with the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, the number of incidents in the vicinity of United Nations observation post 56 and United Nations position 62 decreased significantly. Positions 68 and 69 continued to be caught in crossfire on an almost daily basis.

14. In utilizing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed by the Disengagement Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line. UNDOF continued to observe and report instances of transborder movements of unidentified individuals between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in the northern part of the area of separation. The Force Commander maintained regular and close contact with the Israel Defense Forces and the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate.

15. The Syrian security forces continued to maintain checkpoints that they established inside the area of separation when they began military operations in the area. With armed opposition groups dominant in parts of the area of separation, the Syrian armed forces have withdrawn from checkpoints in some areas and reinforced their presence in others. The Syrian armed forces strengthened their deployment in areas close to the main road crossing the area of separation between the towns of Khan Arnabeh and Al Quneitra. In addition, Syrian armed forces personnel maintained checkpoints at the eastern entrances to the area of separation, straddling the Bravo line, to control and restrict traffic. The checkpoints have interfered often with the freedom of movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan. Restrictions on the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan in the areas of separation and limitation have increased as a result of extended clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, disrupting the supply lines to UNDOF positions in the area of separation. At times, the UNDOF main supply road was closed, hampering the movements of UNDOF between Camp Faouar on the Bravo side and Camp Ziouani on the Alpha side. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate

advised UNDOF that, for security reasons, all United Nations personnel should avoid areas where there were clashes and that UNDOF should not carry out night-time patrols.

16. On 2 February, UNDOF vehicles carrying out a night movement that had been coordinated with the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate were fired upon by light and heavy machine gun fire as the vehicles approached a Syrian armed forces checkpoint approximately 3 kilometres south-west of Camp Faouar. The patrol returned fire and subsequently returned to the camp. There was no injury to United Nations peacekeepers, but some bullets hit the United Nations vehicles. The Force Commander strongly protested the incident to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, who stated that an investigation would be carried out. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate also said that armed members of the opposition had been moving in the area at the same time, which may have prompted Syrian armed forces personnel to fire when the UNDOF vehicles approached the checkpoint.

17. During the reporting period, United Nations personnel encountered increased restrictions of movement and heightened risk, owing also to the placement of improvised explosive devices alongside roads in the area of separation. UNDOF continued to observe the presence of a roadblock with anti-tank mines placed among rocks in proximity to United Nations position 60, a roadblock north of New Hamidiyeh, as well as the improvised explosive device on an access road to United Nations observation post 56. UNDOF movement also was impeded by the suspected presence of anti-tank mines or improvised explosive devices on the main road in the vicinity of Al Qahtaniyah, suspected improvised explosive devices on the road from Um Batinah to Muraba'at in the vicinity of Mamtanah, suspected improvised explosive devices and roadblocks in the vicinity of Ruihinah and on the main road close to Um Batinah.

18. On 10 December, an UNDOF convoy comprising seven vehicles was fired upon with small arms in the vicinity of Ruihinah. Two vehicles sustained bullet impacts. On 24 December, an UNDOF supply convoy comprising five vehicles was fired upon by armed elements in the vicinity of Ruihinah village, close to position 68. The firing resulted in two rounds of small arms fire hitting one of the armoured vehicles; no United Nations personnel were injured. Again, on 20 January, an UNDOF convoy moving to the same position was stopped at a checkpoint in Ruihinah by members of the armed opposition. While checking the vehicles and the identification of the United Nations personnel, the armed members of the opposition queried the nationality of some of the United Nations personnel, assuming that they were of Russian nationality, and enquired about the religious affiliation of one staff member. On 22 January, an UNDOF convoy travelling to United Nations position 68 was subjected to a vehicle search by five armed persons at a temporary mobile checkpoint along the road between Um Batinah and Ruihinah. During the vehicle inspection, one of the armed persons assumed one UNDOF soldier was of Russian nationality and subsequently fired one round through the open backdoor of the vehicle. The gunfire hit the window of the United Nations vehicle and ricocheted off the helmet of one peacekeeper, causing slight injury to the peacekeeper. The convoy sped away to United Nations position 68, where the peacekeeper was treated. The vehicle sustained three bullet impacts. On 23 February, a stray bullet hit the roof of a United Nations vehicle in the vicinity of Kudnaa, in the area of limitation. On 28 February, gunfire originating from the Syrian armed forces position at Tal al-Garbi landed in proximity to an UNDOF convoy in the vicinity of observation

post 53. Owing to the presence of armed opposition groups in the general area of Bayt Jinn and Mazra'at Bayt Jinn in the northern area of limitation, UNDOF rerouted its movements to Mount Hermon positions, resulting in a doubling of the travel time in each direction. On three occasions during the reporting period, mortar fire impacted between 20 and 100 metres from an UNDOF convoy travelling between Camp Faouar and Damascus. There were no injuries to United Nations personnel or damage to United Nations vehicles.

19. UNDOF has protested the presence of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation, the firing into and inside the area of separation and the firing towards United Nations personnel and facilities. The Force Commander reiterated to the Syrian authorities the obligation of the armed forces to halt military operations in the area of separation and to cease firing from the area of limitation, stressing the importance of abiding by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement and ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground. Senior United Nations officials have conveyed similar messages to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

20. Within this challenging operational environment, UNDOF supervised the area of separation by manning static positions and conducting around-the-clock observation to ensure that the military forces of both parties were excluded from it. UNDOF, through Observer Group Golan, continues to establish temporary observation posts in several locations along the ceasefire line on the Alpha side between two and four times weekly, so as to increase the Force's situational awareness of the area of separation, in particular in the south, where United Nations positions and observation posts have been vacated temporarily owing to the security situation. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied Observer Group Golan inspection teams. Inspections and mobile operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remain suspended because of the security situation. As in the past, the Force faced restrictions on freedom of movement and its inspection teams were denied access to some positions on the Alpha side. Observer Group Golan members also continued to encounter a number of restrictions of movement on the Alpha side when entering and exiting United Nations observation post 52, located to the east of the Israeli technical fence.

21. UNDOF continued to adapt its operational posture to the ongoing IDF training activities and new military construction in the area of limitation on the Alpha side, Syrian civilian developments in proximity to the ceasefire line in the area of separation and military activities by the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in its area of operation. The Israel Defense Forces continued to enhance the technical fence to prevent crossings from the area of separation. Both sides maintained their defensive positions in the respective areas of limitation. Israeli customs officials continued to operate periodically at the Israel Defense Forces post at the UNDOF crossing gate between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

22. In the vicinity of the ceasefire line in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. Owing to the long-term presence of the mines and the deterioration of their detonation systems, the threat is now higher than in previous years. On several occasions throughout the reporting

period, United Nations personnel observed armed and unarmed persons digging out and removing landmines in the vicinity of the IDF technical fence and from around United Nations position 85.

23. The limitations imposed by the security situation on the Bravo side notwithstanding, UNDOF continued its efforts to liaise with local authorities and engage with the local population to explain the mandate and activities of the Force. This remained important in the light of the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation and as part of the effort to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

24. On 8 January, UNDOF, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), facilitated the crossing of nine students from the Bravo side to the Alpha side. On 4 December, UNDOF facilitated the handover from the Israeli authorities to the Syrian authorities of one wounded Syrian armed forces soldier who had been hospitalized in Nahariya, Israel, through the Alpha and Bravo gates under the auspices of ICRC. UNDOF continued to provide emergency medical treatment to civilians on a strictly humanitarian basis. During periods of intensive shelling by the Syrian armed forces of villages in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, local inhabitants fled, moving to safer areas in the area of separation and limitation, at times seeking shelter in the vicinity of United Nations positions 68, 69 and 80. On 31 January, three representatives of an armed opposition group approached United Nations position 80 and requested food, medicine and water, as well as connection to electricity, stating that the nearby villages had not had electricity for several days. The United Nations personnel at the position were unable to provide the requested items.

25. As at 3 March, UNDOF comprised 1,240 troops, including 38 women, from Fiji (509), the Philippines (346), India (194), Ireland (117), Nepal (72) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 86 military observers from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), including three women, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

26. Given the evolving security situation in the UNDOF area of operation, UNDOF further adjusted its operations with a view to ensuring its ability to implement its mandate safely and securely. UNDOF continued to concentrate on static activities in an effort to reduce the exposure of personnel to danger, while focusing on enhanced situational analysis, reporting and liaising with the parties to prevent situations from escalating. Only essential operational and administrative movements are currently carried out. The operational adjustments also involved a temporary shift in the focus of the activities of a number of Observer Group Golan military observers from patrolling and inspection to static observation, liaison and situation analysis. Restrictions placed by some Member States on the activities of UNTSO military observers on the Bravo side continue to hamper significantly the implementation of the mandate of UNDOF. In addition, most of the recommendations set forth in the military capability study have been implemented.

27. UNDOF continues to adopt and update mitigation measures on the basis of a comprehensive risk assessment carried out by the Force with the support of the Secretariat. Measures introduced earlier remain in place, including the reinforcement by UNDOF soldiers of observation posts manned by Observer Group Golan military observers in specific locations, regular rehearsals of evacuation exercises, improved perimeter control of the Force headquarters and provision of

personal protective equipment to all military and civilian personnel and the necessary training. A Force Protection Officer and additional security personnel recently joined the Mission strengthening critical security functions. In addition, Ireland agreed to contribute a counter-improvised explosive device capability comprising personnel and equipment. This will improve significantly the Force capability to counter improvised explosive devices. The security situation has rendered it necessary for UNDOF to continue to use, with the cooperation of the relevant authorities, alternative ports of entry and departure for Force personnel.

28. All movements of UNDOF personnel on the Bravo side continue to be carried out in formed convoys using armoured vehicles. Logistics movements are provided with armed escorts. Following the arrival of additional light armoured vehicles, all UNDOF national staff whose positions are based at UNDOF headquarters, Camp Faouar, now regularly report to work. A number of national staff, whose functions do not require their presence in Camp Faouar, continue to work from the UNDOF office in Damascus. Only essential international staff work in Camp Faouar. The offices of non-essential staff have been relocated to Camp Ziouani, which also serves as alternate headquarters of the Force.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

29. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2131 (2013) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2014, called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/68/371), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 67/24 on Jerusalem and 67/25 on the Syrian Golan.

30. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing the prospects for their resumption and progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the crisis and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Observations

31. I remain deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications for the stability of the region. The situation has continued to affect significantly the UNDOF area of operation. The ongoing military activities in the area of separation continue to have the potential to heighten tensions between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and to jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries, in addition to heightening the risk to United Nations personnel.

32. The security developments in the UNDOF area of operation underline the volatility of the situation. The use of heavier weapons by both the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in the continuing Syrian conflict, including the significantly increased use of air power by Government forces in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, at times in close proximity to the area of separation and thereby increasing the risk of escalation across the ceasefire line, is a disturbing development.

33. I condemn the purported use of "barrel bombs" by the Syrian armed forces. I condemn the horrific atrocities committed by some armed members of the opposition. I call upon all parties to the ongoing conflict to respect international humanitarian law. I reiterate that all military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the long-held ceasefire and the local civilian population, in addition to United Nations personnel on the ground. They undermine the Disengagement Agreement and the efforts of UNDOF to implement its mandate. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operation. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. Countries with influence should ensure that all parties respect the principles of international humanitarian law.

34. The presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation, in addition to the firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line, are grave violations of the Disengagement Agreement. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line are also grave violations of the Disengagement Agreement. I stress the importance of all parties' liaison with UNDOF in the first instance to prevent escalation of the situation. I call upon all parties to take all measures necessary to protect civilians and ensure respect for the safety and security of UNDOF personnel, in addition to freedom of movement for the Force throughout its area of operation. For its part, the United Nations will spare no effort in ensuring that the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

35. I remain deeply concerned by the numerous incidents involving United Nations personnel on the ground. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. It must be recalled that UNDOF was established by the Security Council with the agreement of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and that its mandate was prescribed by the Disengagement Agreement and the Protocol thereto. UNDOF is mandated to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, to see that it is scrupulously observed and to supervise the Agreement and the Protocol thereto with regard to the areas of separation and limitation.

36. Any hostile act against United Nations personnel on the ground, including restricting their movement and threatening their physical safety, the direct and indirect firing at United Nations personnel and facilities by the Syrian armed forces or armed members of the opposition, and the use of United Nations premises, including United Nations positions vacated temporarily, by members of the armed opposition or for shelter by the Syrian armed forces personnel in the course of fighting, is unacceptable. I remain deeply concerned about some United Nations positions, in particular those near Ruihinah and Braika, regularly being caught in crossfire between the two sides. The presence and increased use by armed members

of the opposition of improvised explosive devices in the UNDOF area of operation, and in particular close to and on access routes to United Nations positions, are also of deep concern. Such devices put United Nations personnel on the ground at risk and impede the freedom of movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan. The safety and security of UNDOF personnel and Observer Group Golan military observers, essential to enabling UNDOF to continue to implement its mandate, must be preserved.

37. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I note the assistance provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in facilitating the provision of essential supplies in support of the Force efforts to ensure that it continues implementing its mandate safely and securely. It is imperative that respect for the privileges and immunities of UNDOF and its freedom of movement be ensured. Armed members of the opposition operating in the UNDOF area of operation must be apprised of the mandate of the Force and immediately cease any actions that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground. I am deeply concerned by numerous incidents of threatening behaviour by some members of armed opposition groups against United Nations personnel on the ground. It remains critical that countries with influence continue to strongly convey to the armed opposition groups in the UNDOF area of operation the need to halt all activities that endanger United Nations peacekeepers on the ground, including firing at peacekeepers, and using United Nations-marked assets and equipment or United Nations positions, and to accord United Nations personnel the freedom to carry out their mandate safely and securely.

38. It is equally critical that the Security Council continue to bring its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate freely and securely within its area of operation and to carry out its important mandate. It is essential that UNDOF continue to have at its disposal all the means and resources that it needs to carry out its mandate safely and securely. It is vital that UNDOF retain the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries. I am grateful to the Governments of Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands and the Philippines for their contributions to UNDOF and for staying the course under challenging circumstances. In addition, I am grateful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO. I welcome the removal of restrictions on the activities of UNTSO military observers serving on the Golan by some Member States. In view of the measures that UNDOF continues to adopt to ensure the safety and security of personnel, I encourage other Member States to consider doing the same. The continued credible presence of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan and in the region.

39. Given the volatile security situation in its area of operation, the Force regularly reviews and adjusts as necessary its posture and operations and implements necessary mitigation measures. The process to enhance the self-defence capabilities of UNDOF, including increasing the strength of the Force to about 1,250 personnel and improving its self-defence equipment, within the parameters of the Protocol to the Disengagement Agreement, continues. The Force is putting in place measures to enhance its capability to counter the increased danger posed by improvised explosive devices. In addition, UNDOF continuously reviews and

updates its contingency plans. The support of the parties and the Security Council is critical as UNDOF continues to adapt to a continuously evolving situation.

40. The current security situation has continued to disrupt UNDOF support and logistical activities on an almost daily basis, complicating significantly the ability of the Force to carry out its mandated tasks effectively. It is essential that the parties continue to provide all the support necessary to ensure appropriate conditions for United Nations personnel on the ground and cooperate fully in facilitating the support and logistical activities of the Force.

41. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Singha, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform with efficiency and commitment, under challenging circumstances, the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to make its best efforts to carry out its mission. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those providing UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.